

EMILY DEMICCO

WRITTEN TESTIMONY BEFORE THE LABOR AND PUBLIC EMPLOYEES COMMITTEE

SEPTEMBER 28, 2015

Thank you Senator Gomes and Representative Tercyak for holding this public hearing on the effects of the recent budget cuts at the Department of Labor.

My name is Emily Demicco, I work as a Community Services Representative in the Middletown Unemployment Insurance call center. Every day I work with claimants to help them file claims and resolve issues with claims that are being held

The Department encourages applicants to file claims online, however, for many this is not possible or simply not desirable. In addition, while the website has a number of guides and frequently asked questions, many people, especially when they are unsure about what information is required, want to talk with a human being. This is totally understandable considering that these are people who are not working anymore, but still have bills to pay and still need to eat.

If you have not been to a call center, I encourage you to visit. There are a couple of dozen of us in cubicles with headsets and computer screens taking call after call. On the wall is a big screen that shows the number of callers waiting to talk with someone and how long they have been waiting.

While there are occasional slow days, at the beginning of the week, anything under an hour is considered a short wait time. On days when it gets really bad, like during the weeks preceding and following a fiscal quarter change, waits can go up to several hours. During the really bad days, if you call in, an automated system will schedule you for a time the following day or later that week when you will receive a call back.

When I get a caller that has been on the phone waiting for a long time, you can hear in their voice a mix of exhaustion, desperation, and relief. The people who call in and wait all that time really need the benefits.

I'm really glad that our unemployment rate has gone down. That's a great thing. However, as someone who takes calls from those trying to file, I can tell you a reduction in staff in the call centers will lead to longer wait times.

Rather than keeping the unemployed on hold for hours, I hope this process results in us finding easier ways these claimants can take advantage of the benefits they have qualified for, as well as the help available from excellent Employment Services staff to find their next job. That simply won't be possible if the Department of Labor lacks the number of front-line workers needed to do the job.